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SUBJECT: KRG ELECTIONS AND THE WAY FORWARD

REF: BAGHDAD 2003

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Robert S. Ford for reasons 1.4 (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Preliminary results of the Kurdistan elections show the Goran Change List outperformed the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) list in PUK's home base of Sulemaniyah, but the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and PUK are set to retain their hold on power in the north and have struck a deal to name the PUK's Barham Salih as KRG Prime Minister. Preliminary results released by the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) today also show Masoud Barzani winning the KRG presidential race with close to 70% of the vote. With opposition party Goran's surprisingly strong performance, the KDP-PUK Alliance has plans to bring Nawshirwan Mustafa into the fold to present a united front in dealing with Baghdad and in competing in the upcoming national elections. Talabani insiders confirmed that PM Maliki called to agree to meet with Barzani. KDP asserts that a Maliki-Barzani reconciliation will only occur if Maliki takes concrete steps toward solving Peshmerga integration, the stalemate of Mosul's Provincial Council leadership, and the impasse on hydrocarbons and revenue sharing. Embassy will closely monitor KRG and GoI preparations for this meeting and press for the two sides to move to bridge their differences. The Kurds continue to press for an ambassadorial-level interlocutor. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On July 28, Washington-based KRG Representative Qubad Talabani informed PolOff that his father, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, persuaded Masoud Barzani to keep his promise to make Barham Salih KRG prime minister. According to Talabani's Political Advisor, Aram Yarwessi, Masoud Barzani called Barham to pledge his support while KRG PM Nechirvan Barzani telephoned Barham to give him his blessing. This late-night negotiation appears to have taken place unbeknownst to some of KDP's leadership. When Emboffs met with KRG Chief of Staff Fuad Hussein and Minister of External Relations Falah Mustafa, both said KDP's vote tallies (reftel) indicate that Nawshirwan Mustafa's Goran List received more votes than the PUK in Sulemaniyah. Consequently, he was confident that KDP would not let the losing party's nomination, Barham Salih, to be named KRG PM. Hussein even expressed sympathy for Barham's loss but added that he still had his Deputy Prime ministerial position in Baghdad. In a July 29 telcon with PolOff, Barham Salih confirmed that he would be the next KRG PM and promised to come to Baghdad to say his goodbyes.

¶3. (C) Fuad Hussein said he was pleased that the lack of violence, notable infractions, and violations would mark these elections as legitimate. He predicted that when the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) announced the preliminary results, Masoud Barzani will be confirmed as the winner of the first-ever KRG presidential race, dispelling any complaints that Barzani was forced upon the Kurdish people. Hussein commented that former PUK Deputy General Secretary Nawshirwan Mustafa perfectly timed his entry into elections as the opposition candidate and, as a result, received the protest vote. He asserted that Kurds do not

actually want Nawshirwan as a leader, but just as an alternative to the status quo.

The Way Forward - Baghdad and National Elections

¶4. (C) According to Hussein, Barzani and Talabani will attempt to incorporate Nawshirwan into the Kurdish Alliance (KAL) because it is imperative to present a united front when dealing with PM Maliki and the Iraqi central government (GoI). Rubbing his fingers together, Hussein said, "With Nawshirwan, it's always about money." In addition to bringing Nawshirwan into the KAL, he said that they want the Kurdish Islamic Union Party of Four -- not the Goran List -- to become the true opposition party to the KAL. (Note: KIU already receives equal funding from both KDP and PUK. End Note.)

¶5. (C) With no one representing Masoud Barzani's interests in Baghdad, Hussein said that Barzani and Talabani plan for a serious re-working of their Baghdad team, making it "airtight and cohesive on all levels." Hussein described the current Kurdish Baghdad team as a gaggle of strong personalities with no coordinated effort. All positions would be reviewed as a group (i.e. Presidency, Deputy Prime Ministry, KAL ministers and parliamentarians). He mentioned that Hoshiyar Zebari would probably not return as foreign minister and agreed that the ministry would be used as a bargaining chip with the Sunnis. He also did not rule out the Iraqi presidency as another bargaining chip. With all the maneuvering of people and positions, Hussein was

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uncertain whether Rowsch Shaways would continue as the KRG representative on the UNAMI High Level Task Force. He added that it would partly depend on PM Senior Advisor Sadiq Rikabi's participation.

¶6. (C) With a view to future negotiations for national elections, Hussein said to expect the Shia coalition (Etilaf) to re-form, but without Maliki's Dawa. (Note: The Shia coalition, known as the United Iraqi Alliance, originally included Dawa Tenzim, Jafaari's Dawa, ISCI, the Sadristes and Fadhila. End Note.) He added that Maliki would have to make major concessions to these parties for their support.

Maliki-Barzani Reconciliation

¶7. (C) Looking forward, Hussein enumerated three concrete steps that PM Maliki must take if wanted to win back Masoud Barzani's trust:

- Peshmerga integration: Need Maliki to approve funding and training.
- Mosul Provincial Council: Need Maliki's assistance to get al-Hadba party leader Atheel al Nujaifi to work with elected Kurds.
- Hydrocarbons legislation: Need Maliki to take Shahrastani out of the equation and come to an agreement with KRG.

Hussein believes these three issues can be resolved before national elections. He stated that if Maliki wanted the Kurds to support him in these elections, he should want to put in the requisite effort. Hussein emphasized that Maliki would never have Masoud's support unless he was willing to deal on these three issues. He said Maliki had agreed to travel to Lake Dohkan and meet Barzani after KRG elections and his visit to the United States, and that Talabani would make the arrangements. (Note: Both Kurdish and Dawa contacts have indicated that the meeting would only take place if there were deliverables to announce at its conclusion. Aram Yarwessi, on July 28, told PolOff that Maliki called Talabani to say, "I look forward to meeting

Barzani wherever and whenever you wish." End Note.)

U.S.-Kurd Relationship

¶8. (C) Fuad claimed that the lack of regular U.S. Embassy engagement with KRG officials was evidence of an emerging anti-Kurd U.S. policy. He pressed for an ambassadorial-level interlocutor.

¶9. (C) Comment: With preliminary results showing the continued strength, Kurdish leaders have plunged into preparations for national elections and have finally prioritized the grocery list of Kurd-Arab issues. Even though the Kurds are ready to come to the negotiating table, success will primarily depend on how much Maliki thinks he needs the Kurds support in the national elections. Peshmerga integration, Mosul's Provincial Council impasse, and movement on hydrocarbons comprise a heavy agenda for a first meeting between Maliki and Barzani. Embassy will closely monitor KRG and GoI preparations for this meeting and press for the two sides to move to bridge their differences. End Comment.
FORD